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Talking Points for DCIEthiopia-Somalia

The Ethiopian incursions into Somalia follow an Ethiopian defeat by rebels in Eritrea.

- Ethiopian Chairman Mengistu last month halted the costly offensive in the north against Nakfa, the main rebel stronghold.
- Mengistu's intentions to resume the offensive in Eritrea this fall will be complicated by the increasing strength of Marxist rebels in adjacent Tigre province.
- Despite these reverses, Mengistu's hold on power appears secure: he can blame the Soviets for bad advice, the Sudanese for helping the rebels, and his military commanders for incompetence.

Ethiopia's current attacks on Somalia were undertaken without shifting forces to the Ogaden from the north.

- Mengistu had planned to initiate cross-border operations into Somalia to aid anti-Siad Somali guerrillas after a successful campaign in Eritrea.
- But instead he decided to move now against Somalia despite his reverses in the north.
- The current attacks probably were timed to retaliate for recent Somali operations in the Ogaden.

Mengistu apparently hopes through military means to set off a train of events that will topple the shakey Siad regime.

- He believes this can be done without a full-scale invasion.

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- Ethiopian forces have made artillery or air attacks all along the border with Somalia, and Ethiopian ground forces have penetrated into Somali at two points (Balenbale and Goldogob -- see map).
- If Somali forces fail to resist strongly, the Ethiopians may try to set up an anti-Siad "government" in captured Somali territory, and encourage other anti-Siad elements to rally to the alternative "government."
- Thus far, the poorly-equipped and thinly-stretched Somali army, after falling back initially, has organized at least one counterattack, and is trying to mount another.
- If the military situation worsens, the widespread discontent in Somalia could surface and further erode President Siad's position.

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